

null
Anne W McNeill 10/20/2006 02:40:59 PM From DB/Inbox: Search Results

Cable
Text:

UNCLAS WARSAW 01142

SIPDIS
CXWARSAW:
ACTION: ECON
INFO: FCS POL ADM MGT ORA DCM AMB PAS

DISSEMINATION: ECOX
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: ECON:RRORVIG
DRAFTED: ECON:MKATULA, RRUDZIN
CLEARED: FAS: EPORTER DOS: MSPIRNAK

VZCZCWRI459
RR RUEHC RUEHZN RUEHRO RUEHKW RHEHNSC RUEHRC
RUEHBS
DE RUEHWR #1142/01 1630936
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 120936Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY WARSAW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0999
INFO RUEHZN/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0860
RUEHKW/AMCONSUL KRAKOW 1131
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 WARSAW 001142

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/NCE DKOSTELANCIK AND MSESSUMS
DEPT PASS USTR FOR DVETTER AND WBUSIS
DEPT FOR USDA/FAS
USDOC FOR 4232/ITA/MAC/EUR/DBURGESS AND MRODGERS
FAS FOR ITP/PSHEIKH, MWOLSEY; BIOTECH GROUP LJONES, RFECITT
USEU FOR USTR CWILSON, MDASTIN
NSC FOR JHERRMANN
ROME FOR USMISSION BRAKEL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: TBIO ECON EAGR ETRD PL
SUBJECT: SENIOR DOS AGRICULTURAL BIOTECH ADVISOR SPIRNAK'S
TRIP TO POLAND - MAY 21-25

REF: WARSAW 917

Sensitive but unclassified - not for internet distribution.

11. (SBU) Summary. Madelyn Spirnak, State Department Senior Advisor for Agricultural Biotechnology, attended meetings in Warsaw on May 22 and 23, and in Krakow on May 24, 2006. Her visit came at a crucial time in the new GOP's legislative assault on agricultural biotechnology. In March the GOP drafted its "Framework Policy" (see reftel), and Spirnak learned during her visit that President Kaczynski has signed new legislation banning GMO seed sales and registration in Poland. While all of her interlocutors were willing to listen to USG arguments on the subject, the GOP's position remains that only very limited uses of GMOs will be allowed in Poland. Although the new Agriculture Minister may be less stridently opposed to some uses of GM technology, parliamentary members stressed that they would continue to promote an anti-GMO policy, even if this means enacting legislation stricter than EU standards, and perhaps violating Polish EU and WTO obligations. End summary.

¶2. (U) Background. On May 17, 2006 the President of Poland signed legislation that will ban the sale and registration of biotechnology seeds in Poland. The legislation will enter into force 30 days after its publication, which is expected soon. The legislation does not ban the planting of biotech seeds varieties registered in the EU seed catalogue and purchased outside of Poland. Polish farmers currently are not using biotech seed, but trade contacts report there are some varieties of Bt corn available that should be economically beneficial to Polish farmers. During debate in Parliament, legal advisors for both houses of Parliament reportedly told legislators that the legislation would violate EU regulations. Many in the Polish scientific community, including government scientists, have publicly expressed opposition to this legislation.

Ministry of Environment

¶3. (SBU) On May 22, 2006, Spirnak began her meetings in the Ministry of the Environment with Małgorzata Wozniak, Senior Specialist, and Krzysztof Lissowski, Acting Director, both of the Department of Nature Conservation. Wozniak explained that the Ministry of Environment's primary role in crafting Polish legislation is in preparing EU biotech regulations for implementation in Poland. However, she continued that the Ministry of the Environment is very concerned with the potential environmental and human health impacts of biotech, and that very restrictive regulations should be expected. Wozniak also mentioned that the GOP's Commission on GMOs will begin meeting again very soon, and will be a body composed of personnel from several ministries. The Commission will provide recommendations on GM issues, and will report directly to the Minister of Environment. Spirnak stated that the U.S. hopes that any regulatory steps that Poland takes will be based on science and not politics. She also mentioned that regulations that go beyond the stringent EU regulatory system could be harmful to joint U.S.-Polish trade interests as well as US-EU relations on this sensitive issue. Lissowski commented that he and Wozniak are only civil servants, and must comply with any instructions they are given by the politicians who run the government. Spirnak retorted that civil servants are obliged to give good advice to superiors. Lissowski replied that not everyone wants to listen to opinions of civil servants.

Ministry of Science

¶4. (SBU) At the Ministry of Science, Spirnak met with Undersecretary of State Olaf Gajl (strictly protect), who led off the meeting by stating that Poland needs stronger educational programs on biotechnology issues because Polish society is traditional and conservative, and Polish farmers are not well educated. Gajl also noted that there is a general communication problem on the issue and that the Ministry of Science may try to form biotech working groups at the official level (Gajl stated this is rumor only at this point). Gajl also noted that biotech industry development is his responsibility and he hopes to form eco-biotech working groups to unite industry, scientists and government officials to develop strategies for moving biotech forward in Poland. Biotech industry development is his responsibility and he personally would like to move this idea forward. He also requested USG assistance in obtaining factual information on agbiotech that could be used in an information campaign, which he would like to develop for use in institutes of higher education. Although Gajl seemed to be a voice of reason on the issue, he also requested that his statements during the meeting be taken as private, not official Ministry opinions.

Ministry of Agriculture

15. (SBU) Spirnak and Warsaw's FAS Agricultural Counselor met with Undersecretary Chrapek from the Ministry of Agriculture to gain a better picture of Poland's new restrictive seed legislation. Chrapek explained that the seed legislation was Parliament's response to public concerns over biotechnology and acknowledged that it could cause problems for Poland with the European Commission. Chrapek stressed, however, that Poland intends to remain in compliance with EU biotechnology legislation, and in reply to a question, stated that the GOP will change its legislation if the EU determines that it is not in compliance with EU regulations. Chrapek stressed that he hoped that Poland's "safe" approach to biotechnology would not cause problems between our two governments.

Senate and Sejm Agricultural Committee Leaders

16. (SBU) Spirnak held a two-hour meeting with Jerzy Chroscikowski, Senator and Chairman of the Agricultural and Environmental Protection Committee, and Pawel Michalak, Senator, and Chroscikowski's Deputy. Spirnak discussed the increased yield and efficiencies gained through planting GM seed, the need for a no trade barrier approach to GM products, and the myths surrounding the dangers of GMOs. The Senators were quick to refute her arguments and pointed out that the GOP's negative stance on biotech is based on economic and safety concerns. They first mentioned that Poland does not have a food shortage and thus does not need to produce more food. On the contrary, Michalak noted, Poland is currently working to get EU quotas for Polish fruit increased to meet export potential - GMOs simply are not of use to Polish farmers given current realities in Poland. Chroscikowski and Michalak also stressed that the GOP, as well as Polish society, is not convinced of the safety of GMOs, and is not ready to accept the notion without well crafted scientific studies. The Senators also stated that thousands of agricultural workers would lose their jobs if GM foods were introduced, and that no other sector of the Polish economy could absorb them (Chroscikowski then quipped that obviously the U.S. does not want Polish workers), thus canceling out the potential efficiency gains from harvesting GM products.

17. (SBU) Conversation then turned to newly enacted Polish legislation banning GMO seed sales and registration in Poland. Spirnak asked the Senators how the GOP would react if the new legislation were to conflict with existing EU and WTO regulations. Answering with a question, Chroscikowski wondered aloud why the U.S. is so concerned with Poland's EU relations. He invited the USG, if it so desires, to become involved in Poland's interaction with the EU, requesting that it approach Brussels about equalizing the level of agricultural subsidies paid out to EU member states. Chroscikowski also mentioned that as a fan of Polish cuisine, he constantly promotes Polish foods. He wondered why GMO advocates are so adamantly against labeling - basically asking that if the food is good and you believe people will like it, why not label it? The Senators concluded the conversation by stating that the GOP is not against progress and would like to learn more about GM research being conducted in the U.S., but that its primary mission is to protect Polish agriculture, especially organic production, and that the GOP's line on the issue will not move.

18. (SBU) Over lunch, Spirnak and the Ag and Econ Counselors met with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Sejm (lower house) Agriculture Committee, Wojciech Mojzesowicz and Jan Laczny. During this session, Spirnak attempted to discuss the benefits that had been gained globally through GMO crops as well as the growing number of EU countries which were adopting the technology. In response, the parliamentarians gave unsophisticated arguments such as: US women are heavy because they eat GMO food; organic is "healthy" because its natural; confusing fertilizers with pesticides; and most importantly, nationalistic arguments about US and

multinational companies coming to Poland and destroying the Polish farming system. Efforts to present facts about potential benefits for farmers, including increasing their competitiveness within the EU were dismissed.

Grain Producer Association

¶ 9. (SBU) One ray of light was a discussion with Maciej Tomaszewicz of the Grain Producers Association. Tomaszewicz stated that his membership opposed the seed legislation. Asked about biotech/transgenic organisms in general, he replied that his membership had no objection to either feed or food containing GMOs. He also noted that he had recently watched a weekly agricultural television program which focused on the GMO issue. He was pleasantly surprised that the majority of speakers were in favor of the technology for Poland and the lone voice against agbiotech was an ill-prepared Agriculture Ministry Undersecretary (not Chrapek).

Krakow

¶ 10. (SBU) On May 24 Spirnak traveled to Krakow to meet with students and faculty of Krakow Agriculture University and Jagiellonian University, which offers a major in biotechnology. Among the topics discussed were biotechnology legislation, and the future of farming. Educators expressed deep concern that new Polish legislation would inhibit their ability to perform research using biotechnology; indeed they have been waiting months for GOP approval to move forward on one research project. As they are already restricted to testing only in labs and not in open fields, the proposed legislation is another step in the wrong direction. Numerous times, government officials have asked scientists for their opinions on biotechnology. Yet, the professors complained, the government will not listen to these expert opinions advising them to embrace biotechnology. Jagiellonian University Dean Kazimierz Strzalka wonders what the GOP is really afraid of when, in his opinion, GMOs would help Polish farmers more successfully compete with the rest of Europe. He cited a study that indicated that 60% of Polish farmers would use GMOs if they were given the option.

¶ 11. (SBU) The greatest hope, according to Dean Strzalka, is in the hands of students. At a recent Greenpeace meeting held at the university, students were vocal in challenging the assertions made by the Greenpeace "ideologists" concerning biotechnology. Nationally, the Polish Association of Biotechnology Students is well organized. They have a few hundred members, a website, and plans for a national conference in the fall. Strzalka asked if the U.S. could help to provide speakers for the conference, and for a Polish National Biotech Conference that will take place in April ¶ 2007.

¶ 12. (SBU) At the Krakow Agriculture University, Ms. Spirnak addressed a group of approximately 50 students and professors. There were few questions and most were from professors. Based on the Krakow visit, it appears that overall, professors and students of biotechnology support transgenic crops for Poland and feel that they are good for Poland and for farmers. They are frustrated that the GOP is so opposed. They also believe that it is inevitable that Poland will see an increase in farmers using GM seeds from other countries, whether it is legal or not.

Comment - Outreach Critical

¶ 13. (SBU) Comment: Clearly the GOP remains opposed to the use of GM crops in Poland as evidenced by the polite but firm arguments against biotech Ms. Spirnak heard from the majority of her interlocutors. Post believes that the current GOP and

leaders within the Parliament will continue to work within the EU against the expanded use of biotech products in the EU. While there may be a slight positive shift as heard by Spirnak in her meeting with the Ag U/S and by the Ambassador in his introductory call on the new Agriculture Minister (reftel), the Chairs of the Senate and Sejm Agricultural Committees are unwilling to listen to science-based arguments regarding agbiotech. Thus, Post believes the USG should work with pro-biotech scientists, student groups and farmer organizations to educate current and future farmers about the safety and advantages of biotechnology in agriculture. We should also continue to educate GOP officials with the goal of preventing additional regulations that prohibit farmer choice when it comes to biotechnology. Working with the Ministry of Science and Higher Education may also help to spread a more positive message on agbiotech to students and the general public. Finally, we need to push the EU to ensure that Poland and other anti-biotech member states abide by EU commitments as well as WTO obligations governing the use of biotechnology in agriculture. While pushing to open Poland to biotechnology, we need to take care to be seen as protecting choice, not pushing use.

¶14. (SBU) FAS Warsaw and Senior DOS Agricultural Biotech Advisor Madelyn Spirnak have cleared this cable.
ASHE